

Adolescent Fiction on Abortion: Developing a Paradigm and Pedagogic Responses from Literature Spanning Three Decades

Jeff Koloze

I. JUSTIFICATION FOR THIS STUDY AND CRITERIA FOR NOVELS

Consider these following possible first lines:

“It was a dark and stormy night...”

“The inspector looked at the knife protruding from the back of the deceased...”

“Tiffany wondered whether she would ever meet the man of her dreams...”

Each opening line indicates in what genre the work of fiction can be categorized. For Gothic fiction, for example, the paradigm seems to be that there must be a dark, ruined castle. There must be a heroine or some other damsel in distress. There must be a sinister presence. The opening section, if not the opening paragraph or the opening line, must address certain meteorological circumstances (accounting for the derivative line ridiculed in much fiction “It was a dark and stormy night...”). And there must be love.ⁱ

A detective novel will situate the reader immediately so that he or she will be hooked into reading about how someone has been murdered.

For a romance—whether it is a Harlequin or a Danielle Steel or a paperback which features a Fabio-typeⁱⁱ stud on the cover holding a sweet, virginal, and buxom young woman lest she fall—certain other criteria of the paradigm must be met (including some already facetiously stated here).ⁱⁱⁱ Although feminism has empowered women to unparalleled degrees in the last thirty years, the contemporary romance is still much fashionable with young American women and appeals to them

for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the appeal of the glossy-covered paperback romances indicates just how successful the romance paradigm is in the marketplace of ideas. Women buy these books or borrow them from the libraries because they follow a basic pattern: girl meets boy; boy and girl fall in love; girl and boy fall out of love; boy and girl are tortured for a time; and finally girl and boy fall in love again and live happily ever after (whether that living is done in a sacramental union or not is up to the individual writer's tastes and religious and moral persuasions).

Before analyzing details of a possible paradigm for the typical adolescent abortion novel, we must consider an important presumption of this paper. Why should we even care what our college and university students read when they were teens? After all, we who are on the faculties of colleges and universities have much more important matters to lecture about and cannot worry about what our students read when they were still teens. While there are definite matters of civil rights and biological rights involved in answering this question, I will propose a more pedagogic response, based on some recent classroom experiences with adult abortion fiction. The following example of literature discussion will demonstrate why we should care.

Recently, while teaching Ernest Hemingway's short story "Hills Like White Elephants," the inability of the students to sympathize with the female main character, Jig, was striking. First, of course, few students know on an initial reading that the story is about abortion. Secondly, even after a traditional New Critical close reading, few students came to understand how tortured Jig feels about being coerced into having an abortion. This inability to appreciate Jig's anxiety is further complicated for the student because there are no "stage directions"—no markers to indicate, for example, with what tone of voice a line of dialogue should be read—to help the student understand certain key passages. Consider the following lines from the story.

"You don't have to be afraid. I've known lots of people that have done it."

"So have I," said the girl. "And afterward they were all so happy...."

"Do you feel better?" he asked.

"I feel fine," she said. "There's nothing wrong with me. I feel fine."

(Hemingway 322, 324)

These lines can be read in multiple ways, especially because, although the prime marker is the hyperbaton used in the first sequence but not in the last two lines of the passage, the author himself gives no indication what words should be emphasized more so as to indicate the tone of the character's voice. For example, Jig's last line can be read so that emphasis is placed on the first-person pronoun: "*I* [meaning not you, American man, but I, your lover] feel fine" or "There's nothing wrong with *me* [meaning this pregnancy is a problem for you, American man, but not for me; I want the child]." With such emphasis, the entire result of this story moves from life-negating to life-affirming.

Some mechanism prohibiting satisfactory interpretation similarly operated in my literature classes. Nearly every student presumed that Jig acquiesced in the American man's effort to force her into abortion.^{iv} When I asked my students if they have ever read anything like Hemingway's story before, the inevitable negative answer made me ask further: what did these new college students, most of whom are just out of high school, read before?

I realize that this was a loaded question. As we know not only from our own experience in the classroom but also from Hirsch's seminal work, the databank of "common knowledge" is disappearing among American students.^v $E=mc^2$? Huh? The Madonna as opposed to Madonna? Wha? When did World War II begin for the British Empire? Duh... Similarly, while it can be argued that what most of my students, especially those from government schools, said to me may be true (that they never read a book through all of high school), I thought that they must be reading something. The libraries continue to buy paperback novels geared for teens. These novels enjoy high circulation. And many of these novels are about abortion. And so I began to investigate abortion as a topic in adolescent fiction.

The novels which I will discuss in this paper have been selected on the basis of four criteria. First, the novels must primarily concern abortion as an actuality or potentiality within the plot development. This necessary condition excludes many other novels which may happen to include teens as subordinate characters but whose true protagonists and antagonists are adults whose actions affect (and may even effect) the

actions of young people.

Secondly, these novels must be established teen fiction. The novels I have selected have satisfied perhaps the most important criterion which demarcates whether a work is to be canonized, the test of time. Granted, while the issue of abortion has a relatively longer history in the adult American literary canon (one thinks of Fitzgerald's novel *Tender Is the Night* published in 1934 or of William Faulkner's *The Wild Palms* of 1939), for teenagers the abortion issue did not hit young adult fictional concerns until the early 1970s. It is striking that adolescent fiction should have had such a delayed reaction from the swarm of controversy as represented in adult novels on abortion. And yet there may be definite reasons to account for this delayed reaction. As Zena Sutherland, a commentator on children's books writes:

Many children today have seen more violence and more sexual titillation on television and in the news than children knew of in the past; almost every child has heard rough language that earlier generations never heard—or didn't hear until they were adults. Not all of these issues affect every child directly, but almost every child knows about them. These facets of contemporary society have appeared in adult literature and, following a pattern of long standing, after a time, they began to appear in books for adolescents, then in books for younger children. Beginning in the late 1960s, one taboo after another was broken in children's literature. (15)

Thus, whatever is meant by "a pattern of long standing," it seems that the world of adult fiction was the testing ground for explosive issues which eventually filtered into the adolescent category. Furthermore, Ramsdell affirms that reading interests of teens changed in the late 1960s:

During the 1940s, 1950s, and well into the 1960s, most of the female teenage population was eagerly devouring the light romances.... Many of them, of course, also dealt with the more substantial issues.... However, the general tone was always innocent and upbeat, and serious topics such as divorce, pregnancy, sex, marriage, drug and alcohol abuse, or death were rarely discussed.

With the advent of the "problem novel" in the late 1960s, things did an about-face. Romance was out and reality was in. Typically, these realistic, often urban-set novels reflected the turbulent times, and social themes such as alienation, isolation, abuse, pregnancy, death, drugs, prejudice, poverty, divorce,

injustice, and sex were the rule. (212)

Thirdly, the novels to be discussed are popular not only with the library community (especially young adult librarians whose recommendations often determine whether the books will be purchased for public and school library collections).^{vi} These novels are also popular with the readers themselves in terms of theme. Teen readers want to read about the lives of such experientially based characters. As Diana Tixier Herald indicates in her study of teen reading preferences in her recent book, *Teen Genreflecting*: “Even with the escalating rate of teen pregnancy and the prevalence of teens keeping their babies, teens still want to read about how others cope with the situations caused by early parenthood” (86). A subdivisional point of this criterion is that, with one significant exception, all novels had to be American in production or authorship. If the United States is the greatest advocate of keeping abortion legal throughout the nine months of pregnancy, then studying how American teens respond to abortion fiction may suggest what tone future voters will bring to political resolution of this biological rights question.^{vii}

Finally, the titles I will examine will be what I consider the best either for the span of years they cover in the real world of abortion politics or for the subject matter.

II. PARADIGM FOR TEEN ABORTION NOVELS

To begin a discussion of the novels, I propose that a template can be helpful. As there are various genres of fiction addressing adult reading interests, each of which has a necessary template, I argue that adolescent fiction on abortion has a template, a paradigm, which orders the novel, the world being depicted, and the characters who move within that world.^{viii} More importantly, perhaps, my paradigm will convey some common themes in teen abortion fiction to which we in higher academia can respond.

PARADIGMATIC ELEMENTS OF ADOLESCENT ABORTION FICTION

1. A teenaged girl (unmarried, seventeen years old, and irreligious) reluctantly discovers that she is a mother.

2. The young mother usually can recount several previous sexual adventures with the father of the child.
 - a. She has difficulty telling not only the father of the child (who is usually the same age and equally irreligious) but also her family about the pregnancy.
 - b. She expresses fears that she will be rejected by the father of the child and by her family.
3. The reaction of the teen father to the pregnancy has three immediate effects.
 - a. He usually accuses the mother of not having used contraception effectively.
 - b. Either not thinking or not aware about alternatives to abortion, he may renounce his child completely; he may also renounce the mother herself.
 - c. The teen father will either encourage or pressure the mother of his child to have an abortion.
4. The mother agonizes over deciding whether to abort or to give birth.
 - a. She sees concrete instances of young mothers who are burdened with their newborns and few examples of young mothers who are happy.
 - b. She thinks that her decision on abortion is constrained by medical or legal limits regarding when abortions can be performed.
5. The decision regarding abortion can generate two significant outcomes for the mother.
 - a. If the mother aborts, especially if the abortion was arranged by either her parents or others, the mother immediately regrets the choice; the relationship with the father inevitably deteriorates, and the novel will end either clearly negatively or ambiguously.
 - b. If she does not abort, the mother will become more mature (whether she decides to keep the baby or put him or her up for adoption); novels which depict that this choice has been exercised will invariably end positively.

Two points must be remembered here. I will group all subdivisional aspects from a given level of my outline together for easier discussion.

Moreover, the functions of each primary level of the outline could be collapsed into four dependent phrases: I. The Teenaged Girl Becomes a Mother; II. The Father's Reaction; III. The Mother's Decision; and IV. Possible Outcomes of Decision. While there are details in individual novels which I will consider which do not fit the paradigm exactly, most novels on abortion for adolescents which I have read and researched generally reinforce the structure presented above to a surprising degree. Now to analyze specific fictional works.

III. ANALYSES OF THE NOVELS

While the decade of the 1960s offers few examples of fiction solely devoted to teenagers dealing with abortion, there are several good examples which can be considered a prelude to the format of most other teen abortion novels. One of these is Shirley Ann Grau's *The House on Coliseum Street* (1961) which depicts what can happen to a young woman who is wealthy, aware that she can attract many men, and who is sexually promiscuous.

THE HOUSE ON COLISEUM STREET

I. *The "teen" mother.* Although she is twenty-years-old (27), three more years than what the paradigm would suggest is the standard, Joan's behavior is reminiscent of an adolescent. She is unable to develop social contacts, even to the point of taking an obscure job in the library far away from other people where she attends college (71). In fact, Joan's self-esteem is so low that she manifests masochistic tendencies (51-52). She is unmarried, a lapsed Catholic (8), and reluctant to acknowledge that she might be pregnant. Joan has had a variety of sexual experiences: not only does she engage in intercourse with her steady boyfriend (83), but she also becomes attracted to a wilder type of man, whom she later discovers is a professor at the college she attends (115). Although her mother asks her if she is being "careful" (86), the reader discovers much later in the story that Joan had been using a diaphragm as her main means of contraception (219).

II. *The father's reaction.* When Joan becomes pregnant, Michael places blame for the pregnancy on her, saying that he thought she would

be “careful” (124). In many ways, their conversation about the three ways to handle the pregnancy is presented on the page in ways similar to Hemingway’s story. Using clipped dialogue, the man is for the abortion while the woman expresses some doubts (125-27).

III. *The mother’s decision.* Although there is little to suggest that she suffers agony in the decision regarding abortion, Joan is able to personalize the unborn child, even though dehumanizing terms are simultaneously used. While she refers to the unborn baby as “the child” in one place, she later says, “it would look something like a shrimp, or a piece of seaweed” (119). Joan acknowledges that the unborn baby is “another generation inside of me. A tiny point of life, a floating point of life” (138).

IV. *Possible outcomes of decision.* Since this novel is written *in medias res*, the reader learns early on that Joan’s mother arranged for the abortion (9); Joan herself derisively thinks how organized her mother became to make arrangements for it (132-33). Although the problems attending the abortion decision seemed to have been lessened for her since her mother and aunt were the ones who planned the abortion, Joan suffers greatly after the abortion is performed.

Amazingly, once the abortion had been performed, Joan “had forgotten to tell Michael,” the father of the child (141); later, however, he was happy that she had the abortion (153).

With the beginnings of what we would now call post-abortion syndrome, Joan minimizes the effect of the abortion by literally minimizing the aborted child: he or she becomes “a tiny speck of a child” (154). A few pages later she is having regrets about the abortion (156). Elsewhere, she wonders what would have been done “with the little shrimp child” (174). She cannot eradicate the memory of the child, though. Joan still recalls the baby (204) and assumes that “the hurt will stop when I’m pregnant” (217); many pages later she still thinks of the aborted child (241).

Joan’s social life deteriorates considerably. She skips classes and ceases to be interested in her steady boyfriend Fred (176), who later confronts her about the abortion (178-80). Joan tries to get Michael fired from his teaching position at the college by saying that he arranged for

the abortion (235-38). She does this to get revenge against Michael, who now has not merely one new girlfriend (a younger student), but also a second one, Joan's younger sister. The ending of the story shows Joan's life destroyed: after she tells the dean of the college about Michael's supposedly urging her to have an abortion, she knows she has to "leave"; at the novel's end Joan is symbolically locked out of her house, sitting on the porch (242).

GROWING UP IN A HURRY

Winifred Madison's *Growing Up in a Hurry* (1973) is the story of sixteen-year-old Karen, who develops a romance with Steve, a Japanese-American boy. Published in the same year as the infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision, this novel clearly illustrates the paradigm in action.

I. *The teen mother.* The circumstances of the protagonist in this novel are worth examination. Karen is a sixteen-year-old (3) who is on a first-name basis with her parents, her slightly aggressive mother, Martha, and her more congenial father, Ross (5-6). Karen has a stutter (8) and probably because of this suffers low self-esteem (11). Karen's older sister is using the pill (40) and her mother is too busy socially to be involved with her (65-66). Steve, Karen's boyfriend, is depicted as an enlightened individual who has seen more of the world than the sheltered Karen. He brings her to visit his friends as they do drugs (76-77); he even encourages her to attend a "population control" talk in their community (83). Halfway through the novel they engage in sexual intercourse (96-97). Karen's sense of religion is displayed when she thanks "Whoever" that her period came (99). Unfortunately, however, Karen later realizes that she is pregnant and calls it a "Terrible Discovery" (120-21).

II. *The father's reaction.* Before their sexual encounter, Steve suggests that Karen go to a "clinic" for "protection" (97). She lacks the courage to enter it, however (99-100). Although she asserts that she is using "the rhythm thing" (109), Karen is careless about "marking calendars" (118).

When informed about the pregnancy, Steve at first feels male pride in being a father, but immediately thereafter suggests that she have an

abortion (124-25). Steve commands Karen to go to a clinic for a pregnancy test; if positive, she should get an abortion.

III. *The mother's decision.* Karen's experience with babies is not positive; she sees a sad sixteen-year-old with a baby (47). Later in the novel, there is a scene of a mother and her child intruding on the conversation (126-27).

And yet, Karen's language describing the unborn child shows her ambiguity regarding the humanity of the unborn. Often Karen will identify the unborn child as a baby (125). In contrast, the child is called "a Thing, an Encumbrance," or simply "it" (131). At one point Karen admits that "it" is "my baby" (159).

Karen decides on abortion and calls an abortionist (133-34). She recalls stories and stereotypes about "abortion butchers" (138). Significantly, the first abortionist she goes to avoids the word "abortion" (142). The first estimate she receives is that the abortion will cost \$300. Unable to pay such a large amount, she contemplates suicide (144). A second abortionist talks about "wanted" life (161) and ultimately convinces her to have one. She is helped in her decision by her mother who, although personally against abortion, thinks that it is the right decision for Karen, probably because news of Karen's pregnancy would be a social embarrassment if it reached the mother's circle of friends (151). At another point, Karen presumes she may need to go to a psychiatrist to get approval for the abortion. It is this fact in the novel which can indicate that either the action is pre-1973 or the characters think that lack of a psychiatric barrier could prohibit an abortion being done on a teenager (161).

More importantly, after deciding on abortion, Karen thinks that Steve will fade from her life (148). She states that she would have turned back from going to the abortionist if Steve had been there to stop her (157).

IV. *Possible outcomes of decision.* After Karen has the abortion, the immediate reaction is sorrow, not even the presumed joy that the "problem" has been resolved. In fact, a couple of pages later, the novel ends with this note of dejection (166-68).

MIA ALONE

Originally published in Sweden in 1973 and then published by Viking Press, Gunnel Beckman's *Mia Alone* (1975) has enjoyed continuous popularity since its debut, perhaps for two reasons. First, the cultural milieu of *Mia Alone* does not differ as radically as another multicultural novel would. Secondly, coming onto the publishing scene so soon after *Roe v. Wade* made the subject matter of the novel contemporary, meaningful, and interesting for young readers.

I. *The teenaged girl becomes a mother.* Seventeen-year-old (56) Mia is faced with the difficult situation of not knowing but only presuming that she is pregnant. Her attraction to her lover Jan is based on physical attributes primarily. Mia had slept with him five times (29-30). Several pages later, the reader discovers that they had used condoms (49). Much later in the progression of the novel, Mia's mother asks her daughter whether she even knows about contraceptives (120).

The indicators for Mia's religious sense are clear. Mia views the ban against sex before marriage as sanctimonious (37) and later in the novel she even questions the existence of right and wrong (39). Similarly, to match her lack of a religious sense, Jan is described as an atheist, even though his father is a minister (75). The closest one comes to determining the ethics and morals by which these young people operate is in a statement contrasting two world views: Mia refers to "the Christian's talk" in distinction to her family's ethics (106). One presumes that the family's ethical sense is devoid of a Christianizing influence. Thus, for example, Mia is able to assert that using contraceptives was "a sin" in a time which she designates only as "before," but that now financial and social exigencies not only suggest contraceptive use but require it (40).

II. *The father's reaction.* Jan has little to say about the possible pregnancy. Although he (and presumably Mia) have had sex education since age five (35-36), Jan had been specifically taught that abortion was murder (51-52). Jan's purported sense of respect for the unborn child, then, functions in this novel only to be an agent of distress to the young mother.

III. *The mother's decision.* Babies are not a good subject or

influence for Mia. Since her agony over being pregnant occurs around the Christmas season, the holy day itself takes on an emblematic function in the novel. Since Mia's exclamation "If only it hadn't been Christmas" is repeated twice (16), the reader's attention is drawn to the importance not only of the season, but also of the main character's reaction to it; the reader would thus question such a seemingly hopeless response. It is significant that the author has Mia note someone else's screaming baby (15). It is even more interesting that Mia says that she hates Christmas (43) and doesn't say what Christmas is all about when she relates her "distaste" of it (78).

Family influences further complicate Mia's thinking about abortion. Mia's parents are separating. Her father is openly anti-life (103), and Mia's mother specifically states that she thought about abortion when she was carrying her (21). Her mother's negativity extends to the condition of all women; she says that women are in a "rat trap" (15). Moreover, Mia's grandmother, whom she respects greatly, asserts that women's liberation for her does not include abortion (64-65).

Mia displays the ambivalence which is typical for young mothers in these novels. A three-week fetus is described as looking "horrid" (42). Mia's response to a classroom situation-ethics type question regarding the survival of a human baby is "God, what a mess" (40). Abortion for Mia is equated with "having it taken away" (94). Only the mother is viewed as "the living person" (106). However, despite her lack of a religious sense, Mia identifies the unborn child with distinctively humanizing terms which the omniscient narrator supplies to help the reader understand what's going on in Mia's mind. Mia, or so the narrator reports, calls the possible unborn baby "a child, which was perhaps already inside her" (21) or a "possible child" (53). Not only does Mia's family compound her agony, but it seems as though this same omniscient narrator also aggravates her: the narrator asks Mia questions about abortion similar to those offered in clinic situations (41). In this way, the narrator of the novel functions as the catalyst for dialogue on the issue of abortion.

IV. *Possible outcomes of decision.* Fortunately for Mia, however, a possible untimely pregnancy is ruled out, almost like a *deus ex machina*:

Mia's period comes a month late (113).^{ix} One of her first reactions is happiness that she doesn't have to make a decision about abortion (114).

However, Mia is committed not to make the same mistake (whether that is getting involved sexually or merely risking becoming pregnant again) in a passage which is strikingly repetitious and adamant in its resolution: "It was as if she would never again be as she had been before, childish like that, and unaware and credulous. Never, never ever again would she expose herself to this. Never. Never ever take a single risk again. That's what it felt like" (117). As a final consequence of her possible pregnancy, Mia turns against Jan (121).

EDITH JACKSON

Although Rosa Guy's *Edith Jackson* (1978) contains writing which drags in some places (92-93), the novel provides insights into the factors which may persuade an African-American teen mother to abort, including financial, familial, and distorted sexual concerns.

I. *The teen mother.* Written in first-person, Edith is a seventeen-year-old African-American (4) whose mother died from tuberculosis and whose father abandoned the family shortly before (29-30). Edith plans to quit school to raise her siblings (35). One other important figure in her life, her minister Reverend Jenkins, sexually assaults her (41-42). Edith's sister Bessie is similarly being sexually aroused by "Uncle" Daniels, the boyfriend or live-in lover of Mother Peters, who is Edith's foster mother (60-61).

Another woman who shows great interest in Edith is Mrs. Bates, who tells Edith that she doesn't "count" (53). It is Mrs. Bates who introduces the idea of "choice" to Edith—but here choice merely means intellectual progress (54-55). Later in the novel, Mrs. Bates says that Edith should be "a person who can make choices and fight for them" (57).

Edith's attitudes toward sex and children are displayed in a few key utterances. She says that her parents should not have had more kids after her sister Bessie was born (74). And, although Edith helps with the abandoned children in the institution to which she is ultimately sent after her stay with another foster family is terminated (98-100), her positive caring attitude toward one particular abandoned child is tempered by a

social worker at the institution who says that the “luxury of choices” is denied to black children (103-04). This nuance of “choice” can be balanced by another statement of Mrs. Bates regarding Edith’s sister’s being adopted by white Jews—it is a “wise choice” in her opinion (129-30).

Edith’s first sexual encounter with any man is with James, the thirty-two-year-old nephew of Mrs. Bates (139-41). Even after he returns to his aunt’s house after an extended absence, his first thought seems to be to get physical with Edith (134). Edith becomes pregnant by him (145).

II. *The father’s reaction.* When she discovers she is pregnant, Edith wants to tell James in order to share the good news with him, hoping that he will want to marry her (154). James’s response is anything but altruistic. While Edith just wants to talk with him about getting married, James rushes her to a friend’s apartment where he tries to force sex with her (156).

III. *The mother’s decision.* In the absence of a strong moral foundation, Edith can rely only on the opinions of others regarding abortion. Mrs. Bates’s daughter Debra thinks that Edith should have an abortion (145); in fact, Debra asserts that abortions are common among her college friends (147). Ruby, the sister of Edith’s best friend Phyllisia, is sick in bed, but the friend casually comments that she “only had an abortion” (175). When she goes to a welfare office to seek financial help with having the baby, Edith is faced with a couple of episodes of children who are certainly not angelic. A belligerent child in the office waiting room disturbs her (182). More negative images of children immediately follow this scene (184).

IV. *Possible outcomes of decision.* This novel ends with Edith deciding to have an abortion; she calls Mrs. Bates, who will be with her during it (186-87). However, her decision to kill the unborn child is obviously negative: when she makes the fateful phone call to her lover’s aunt, Edith does so haltingly, stuttering and stammering in her attempt to get the words out.

LAUREN

Harriett Luger’s *Lauren* (1979) is a good example of teen abortion fiction

closing out the first decade of legal abortion in the United States.

I. *The teen mother.* Lauren's home life presents great difficulties for the heroine of this novel. Her parents fight a lot (6); later in the novel, in one particularly demeaning argument, they suggest that they have other romantic involvements. In fact, Lauren's mother intimates that she got married because she was pregnant (147-48).

II. *The father's reaction.* Lauren's male friends are typical adolescents ogling sex pictures who claim to be familiar with sex. The reaction of Lauren's boyfriend Donnie on hearing that she is pregnant is to command her to go to Planned Parenthood (19). He has a chance to obtain an academic scholarship; since he does not want to jeopardize his chances at obtaining it and she hasn't followed through with his first recommendation, he commands her again to do something (23-24). Donnie asserts that he will "stick by" Lauren (39). They fight, however, when she thinks he's more concerned about his chemistry test than her or the baby (40-1).

III. *The mother's decision.* Lauren's terminology for describing the unborn child is typically ambivalent as in other adolescent novels. Abortion is described euphemistically as "taking care of" the pregnancy (4). She calls the baby a "worm" (21-22). During an exam, Lauren thinks that the baby could be a "monster" in retribution for her "sin" (34). Lauren calls the unborn child a "ghost" and an "it" (67). At one point she calls the baby a "little bastard." To "get even" with it she thinks she will "let [the baby] be born" (104). Despite such dehumanizing language, she knows that the unborn child is a baby (29). Not only that, but she thinks of the baby as a person: "a *me*, an *I*" (154). After an attempted suicide, Lauren's changing attitude is expressed through the omniscient narrator, who calls the fetus a "tiny creature," a positive sign that the humanity of the unborn child is secure now that Lauren has chosen life for herself and, by implication, saved the child from death as well (128).

Lauren made the decision to give birth to the child after some difficult forces tried to persuade her to do otherwise. Not only was she urged to abort by Donnie; even the first thought of her two best friends was that she should get an abortion (25). An abortion counselor tries to

dissuade her against abortion for half an hour (36-37). Her mother wants her to have an abortion (43-44). Donnie's parents want her to have an abortion (47). When she leaves her house, planning to have an abortion, she simultaneously thinks of the possibility of raising the child herself (53). Lauren wonders if she is too far along in the pregnancy, "too late," to have one performed (62).

Fortunately, if it were not for the positive experience of meeting two poor mothers who decided to give birth to their babies instead of having abortions, Lauren could have been just another abortion statistic (56). Liz, one of the two mothers who befriend her and with whom she stays after she leaves home, says that Lauren "didn't do anything wrong" and asserts Lauren's right to keep the baby (69). After a long interlude (the second "book" within the book) with the poor women Liz and Dawn, she attempts suicide by drowning (105). After Lauren returns home, the reader learns that she had been away a month.

IV. *Possible outcomes of decision.* As incredible as it sounds, coming so soon after her suicide attempt, Lauren's parents (and Donnie's parents) still want her to have an abortion (111-12). What is even more incredible is that Lauren falls in love with Donnie again (122-23). Donnie is adamant, however, in not wanting their baby (123-24). Donnie's response to Lauren's query ("how can you love me and not our baby?") is matched by his saying that he feels forced into marriage (124).

Eventually, Donnie loses the scholarship (143). Although Lauren eventually decides to give the baby up for adoption, she does this because she has matured: she wants what's best for the baby (156-57). Moreover, it is suggested that Lauren, no longer an adolescent girl, has now found her own self, has become a woman (156). This new mature attitude is manifested when she chastises her younger sister for engaging in premarital sex; Lauren reacts furiously, telling her sister that she should not engage in such behavior (151-52).

UNBIRTHDAY

A. M. Stephensen's *Unbirthday* (1982) continues the trend of teen abortion novels whose characters have a definite pro-abortion bias.

I. *The teen mother.* Although the teen mother in this novel and her

boyfriend had used condoms “religiously” (8), Louisa Billingham discovers she is pregnant when her period is late (7). Louisa describes herself in this largely first-person narrative as a girl who is “as popular as a python with acne” (14). The opinion which she and Charlie have about sex is easy to summarize: they think sex should be for immediate gratification (22); she even mocks her parents’ cautions against engaging in sex and other rash behavior (26).

II. *The father’s reaction.* Charlie does not seem to have any significant role in this novel except to engage in sex with Louisa and to crack frequent jokes. In fact, the title of the novel can be found in one such joke: having an abortion is an “unbirthday” (82). Driving her to the abortion, Charlie’s humor distracts Louisa from the reality of what she will do (89-90). After she has her abortion, Charlie and Jane (see below) sing “happy unbirthday” to her (107).

III. *The mother’s decision.* Louisa ridicules books in her library which espouse a pro-maternal position (29). Unlike other abortion novels, where images of babies are skewered so that the main character can see how bad it would be to become a mother, in this novel Louisa purposely denigrates the positive images of babies she comes across (51).

Louisa ruminates over her abortion decision clandestinely. The baby is “the biggest secret” in her life (53); she rejects and ridicules the advice to tell her parents about the pregnancy (54-55). Both she and Charlie think that abortion is the best solution to this untimely pregnancy; moreover, he suggests that they not use the word “killing” to denote abortion since the baby is an “it” (56).

Louisa’s secrecy is accomplished with help from a Women’s Center staffperson at a college in the area, significantly named Jane. This affable feminist activist plays an important role in the novel. She relates her own abortion episode to Louisa. According to Jane, the word “abortion” is strictly negative and the alternative “termination of pregnancy” is to her even worse—an honest comment from such a strident feminist activist (63). Jane describes the pre-*Roe* period as bad because women did not have the option of abortion (65). Jane distorts the views of her pro-life mother (65-66). She relates how she thought that she “could get help from Planned Parenthood” (72) and how euphoric she

was over her abortion (72). Jane's narrative regarding her abortion ends with the phrase "The End," and it seems to the reader as though the abortion is the same as a fairy tale or as innocent and simple as any piece of fiction (73). It is shortly after this that Louisa decides on having an abortion (77-78). The abortion itself is "secret": the actions of the aspirator are described, not the actual killing (101).

IV. *Possible outcomes of decision.* Louisa herself says at first that there were no problems after the abortion. She then qualifies that by saying that there may be one: Charlie resents her friendship with Jane. After more narratorial thought, Louisa thinks that there might even be another: the secrecy involved regarding her abortion (108-09). By the last lines of the novel, the reader can presume that her affection for Charlie is slipping as she becomes involved in feminist activism; she records that she is working against "a powerful local congressman" who is "one of the sponsors of a constitutional amendment to ban abortion" (112).

The last one-line paragraph in the novel is one of those statements which proverbially speaks volumes in four words. Speaking about the congressman she's trying to unseat, Louisa says, "He says it's immoral" (111-12). Such a statement, being in third person, not only shows that Louisa has now distanced herself from moral and ethical statements, but also makes it seem that she herself can no longer argue the morality of abortion.

BEGINNERS' LOVE

Norma Klein's *Beginners' Love* (1983) is one of many novels which depicts the abortion decision from the unique perspective of the father.

I. *The teenaged girl becomes a mother.* While the focus of this first-person novel is the hero's reaction to his girlfriend's pregnancy, the reactions of the young mother are reflected in the leading male character.

A seventeen-year-old young man named Joel, who thinks that he is in some way "being like Leda" (172), may be voicing the projection of the lead female character through a male body.^x Thus, for example, the attitude that Joel has toward diverse sexual matters is replicated in Leda. Joel cannot withstand the temptation to masturbate; he does so at least

three times in the novel, not only while thinking about his girlfriend Leda but also about another woman (21, 112, 194). Joel is masturbated at one point by Leda (63) and on another occasion she oral-sexes him (92-93). When she notices that he is having an erection, Leda's response ("Let's just take our clothes off and get it over with") makes it seem as though sex is a chore for these young people, not a pastime of delight (125). Joel's attitude toward sex in general can be summarized in one maxim: he thinks girls want boys who are sexually experienced (35). With such a sexual philosophy Joel finds nothing wrong with having sexual intercourse with Leda at least four times (88, 126, 143, and 162).

Joel is ostensibly Jewish (46), although he affirms that he is not religious (78). His best friend, Berger, who is also irreligious (104), makes snide comments about celibacy (133).

Although Joel's father discourages him from having sex with Leda (106), he asks Joel whether he is using birth control (130). Joel expresses some fear about their not using birth control (91), but it seems clear that the woman is supposed to be the one who is in charge of that. It is only when Leda says that her period is late that she admits she hadn't regularly used her diaphragm (142). Joel, too, assumes some responsibility for the pregnancy, saying that he had some condoms that he "could have used" (144).

II. *The father's reaction.* Joel is certain that, if Leda is pregnant, she'll "just get rid of it" (144). Perhaps in reference to the anti-life feminist joke, Joel finds out by a Father's Day card from Leda that he is a dad (172). Joel accuses Leda of not having been "careful" (174). When asked, Joel thinks she should not have the baby (180). Regarding the baby's future, Joel says "it's better not to think about it" (182). Although he had never thought about babies before, Joel now sees them all over (155).

III. *The mother's decision.* There is no anxiety over an abortion decision between the two young people. Leda is shown on several occasions as having already made up her mind for abortion: she is adamant that, if she is pregnant, she will have an abortion (163) because, for her, "it was just a little clump of cells" that could become "a real baby" with the passage of time (180). Perhaps one factor which led her

to accept abortion—in a reversal of what most other male characters experience in other adolescent novels—Leda is accepted into Yale and being pregnant would prevent her from fulfilling her educational career (176).

IV. *Possible outcomes of decision.* When Leda has her abortion, the other mothers in the abortion clinic look dejected, even though many of them, as in Leda's case with Joel, have with them their boyfriends or the fathers of the babies (197). After the abortion, Leda wants to "celebrate" (203). However, when she and Joel invite another brother-and-sister couple from the abortion clinic over her apartment to smoke some marijuana, almost immediately into the celebration she cries over "our babies" (205). Leda's plaintive "we're all going to be fine," spoken almost immediately after her breakdown over the aborted babies, sounds too similar to the famous lines from Hemingway's story (205). Just as saying "fine" for Jig meant the opposite, so too for Leda, it can be argued, matters will not be satisfactory.

As the novel reaches its denouement, Leda's and Joel's relationship deteriorates after the abortion (207). They grow apart, especially after he goes off to a Texas college (209). The novel ends with a group of characters wanting to see the film *Endless Love*. This was the film which Joel and his best friend saw when they double dated and Joel first met Leda. Joel's final comment about seeing the movie is telling, symbolic as it is of the main characters' now broken relationship: "I saw it already" (216).

LUCY PEALE

From this point on in the paper, I will depart from one of my necessary criteria to analyze three teen novels which show a growing concern, not so much for abortion in contemporary teen fiction but for how a mother or her lover, the father of the child, react to the mother's decision in choosing life over abortion for the unborn child.

Colby F. Rodowsky's *Lucy Peale* (1992), chronologically the first in this new set, is a unique departure from most adolescent fiction. While this novel may depict a lead female character who is responsible for her act of fornication, the culpability is lessened by two factors: Lucy Peale's

father is an ultra-strict fundamentalist Christian who wants his recently-graduated from high school daughter to confess her sin publicly at a revival; secondly, the boy who impregnates her is depicted as one who forced his will on her. Instead of confessing her sin, she runs away (26) and eventually meets another young man, Jake, who harbors her in his apartment, cares for her food and clothing needs, and, most importantly, does not take sexual advantage of the young woman who just happened to come across his path. Jake is a very respectful young man who wants to reserve his sexual powers for marriage with his ideal woman. If this novel merges with the genre of a romance, then *Lucy Peale* is both a novel depicting the lives of two tortured young people caught up in teen pregnancy and simultaneously a novel of mature romance.

I. *The teen mother.* In retrospect, Lucy recalls how she became pregnant. Wanting to get out of her father's stifling environment, Lucy meets a gang of young men which includes Phil, the father of her future child by one act of sexual intercourse (35). She discovers she is pregnant when she vomits from morning sickness (7). When she decides to run away to avoid confessing her sin in public, Lucy realizes that her father is not going to come after her to bring her back home (31).

Lucy's ambivalent thoughts and low self-esteem are detailed in a series of uncomplimentary similes: her thoughts are "like fiddler crabs" (37) or "like burrs on a dog's ear" (43). Other girls whom she sees walking with confidence are "like flies on sticky paper" (39). Lucy is immature and cannot function socially (41). The reader presumes that she is seventeen-years-old since she graduated from high school "this year" (69).

II. *The father's reaction.* Jake, her boyfriend, is a former college man (59). Although he has numerous classic books scattered all over his typically-messy bachelor apartment (61), he found working on the beach more interesting than college. He is not to be considered a beach bum, however; his ambition is to be an assistant to a British author, Adrian Blair, who will be a writer-in-residence at Johns Hopkins (68).

III. *The mother's decision.* Lucy's father is an evangelist who calls her baby a "sin"; she retorts: "my baby's no sin" (11). She doesn't want "to get rid of it" (77). Much later in the novel, there is a curious

reference to the baby as an “it,” but in a humanizing way (116). When the baby kicks, Lucy then “knew” that she was carrying a child (96-97). Lucy says she can’t think of the baby as an “it” after she and Jake discuss things about their life together (116-18). More importantly, Jake provides the necessary moral support for Lucy by reacting happily to news of the baby’s quickening (98-99). Unlike most other teen abortion novels, Lucy experiences a pleasant encounter with some children (87-89). She hopes to marry Jake and be happy with him forever.

IV. *Possible outcomes of decision.* If the abortion portion of the novel seems resolved [Lucy will not have an abortion; she and Jake seem to be the “perfect couple”—they even argue as agreeably as married people do (100-03)], then the problem for the reader over the final sixty pages is to consider whether they can succeed in their ambitions. Fortunately, and, once again, unlike most other teen abortion novels, Lucy and Jake are genuinely religious (94-95). Even though Lucy comes from a family which distorts Christian ideals, they both want the baby to know about God (118). Their “living together” is asexual (100). When Lucy gets into bed with him one night, thinking that the only way she can repay him for his kindness is to offer him what her rapist, the father of her child, took from her, Jake jumps out (106). Sex “counts for too much” for Jake, he tells her (115). Jake considers the baby his (107), he wants to marry her, and (putting most men to shame) he is a perfectly romantic young man (108).

This happiness, which may seem saccharine to most jaundiced readers, is too much for Lucy, however. She plans to leave him so that he will not be burdened with a wife and a baby as he pursues his chance at working for Blair (110, 148-49). Just when it seems this incredibly happy resolution will fall apart, the end of the novel has a virtual *deus ex machina* when Lucy’s sister Doris leaves her strict family and decides to help with the baby (162). Jake goes to Baltimore to become an assistant to Blair. In short, what one would never find in most teen abortion novels, this story ends happily. The final statement (“it’s going to be okay”) conveys none of the ambiguity or despair found in novels where the mother has aborted (164-67).

TOO SOON FOR JEFF

Marilyn Reynolds achieved success not only with her print version of *Too Soon for Jeff* (1994), but also with the made-for-television film adaptation of the novel as well as with her Hamilton High series of stories for teens.^{xi} Like other novels of the early 1990s, this one reflects the anxieties of the father of the child. In a first-person narrative, Jeff Browning relates his experiences with the pregnancy of his lover. Jeff is a seventeen-year-old who has an excellent chance not only at winning his high school's debate competition but also a scholarship to a university just when he discovers that he is a father.

I. *The teen mother.* Christy Calderon, a Mexican-American (35), is Jeff's lover. Although she is depicted as having had a Catholic grade school background (Jeff for some reason laughs when he first hears this fact) (40), Christy is as irreligious as Jeff. Jeff is halfway between being an atheist and being a believer (73). All we know about Christy at the beginning of the novel is that, when she announces her pregnancy to Jeff, she is happy about the baby (13-14).

II. *The father's reaction.* Jeff's reaction to the pregnancy should be understood in the context of his sexual understanding. He is not a virgin (10); presumably, he had used condoms with Christy (16). His mother, who is studying to be a nurse, had talked with him about condoms (17). Jeff's father had abandoned him and his mother when he was little (18). He is unable to control his sexual impulses and masturbates when thinking about Christy (45-46). Jeff was enrolled at a human sexuality class at Planned Parenthood (57). Jeff reports that his friend Jeremy says that abstinence "is the wave of the future" (183). Lest this be interpreted as a statement that he has learned from his sexually explicit ways and will reserve his sexual powers for marriage, the reader is immediately hit with a qualification of this fact about his abstinence history: Jeff couches it negatively by saying that his friend "may be telling the truth about virginity, or he may be following another of his old-fashioned codes..." (183). Even after his experience with Christy, when he eventually goes out-of-state to college, Jeff meets another young woman, for whom he buys condoms, and with whom he has sex at least three times (198, 200-01, and 212).

With this type of sexual background, it should be no surprise that Jeff is angry at the baby. He accuses Christy of being lax about birth control (14); he wants her to have an abortion (15). Even though his mother says that abortion “makes sense” to her (57), Christy calls Jeff a “baby killer” (63).

III. *The mother’s decision.* At one point, while Jeff wonders if it is too late for an abortion (36), Christy is adamant that she will not abort, saying “It’s my body, it’s my choice, and I choose NO ABORTION!” (36). Eventually, Jeff wins the debate competition for his high school and is accepted into a Texas university later that fall (112). Jeff later learns that Christy has given birth to a son (145), whom he later calls “my son” (160). Jeff’s father, however, urges him to disavow anything to do with the child, viewing the pregnancy as a trap on the part of Christy (165).

IV. *Possible outcomes of decision.* Although Jeff and Christy go their separate ways at the novel’s conclusion, Jeff ends the novel with a limp paternal directive: he tells his newborn son not to have sex without a condom (222).

WHAT KIND OF LOVE? THE DIARY OF A PREGNANT TEENAGER

Sheila Cole’s *What Kind of Love? The Diary of a Pregnant Teenager* (1995) follows a category of teen fiction which depicts the anxieties of teen mothers who have exercised their reproductive rights by choosing to give birth to their unborn babies.^{xii}

I. *The teen mother.* Valerie is a fifteen-year-old who describes her sexual relations with her lover Peter early in the novel (7-9). Even though she immediately thought of “protection” because she wanted to have sex with Peter (22), Valerie discovers she’s pregnant (36).

II. *The father’s reaction.* Since he is Harvard- or Stanford-bound (27), Peter suggests she has “to do something” (40). Several pages later it is clear what he wants her to do: ask about abortion at Planned Parenthood (44). Because of perceived time limits on abortion, Peter blames Valerie for waiting so long (57). When Peter proposes marriage to her, the unborn child who was called an “it” suddenly becomes “*Our Baby*” (61). While Valerie progresses in the pregnancy, Peter advances toward his college goals (140). Eventually, Peter reneges on his promise

to marry her (170).

III. *The mother's decision.* Valerie is confronted with an image of a sixteen-year-old girl carrying a baby (43). She calls the baby an "it" (46). Valerie assumes Planned Parenthood is the place to go for birth control (48). Since she's four months pregnant, abortion must be done in a hospital; it will cost her more (52-54). Her parents want her to abort (68). Peter's and Valerie's elopement plans are halted (83-84). Despite an ultrasound, which enables her to bond with her baby (91-92), Valerie calls the baby an "it" (103) or "this thing growing inside me" (107). The unborn child is dehumanized with a direct simile: he or she is "like an alien invader" (112). Eventually, while she still calls the baby an "it," Valerie is able to humanize the child in a direct metaphor which culminates in her first positive emotional statement for the child: he or she is a "little astronaut floating inside...I love you" (127).

IV. *Possible outcomes of decision.* Although she had hoped for marriage and a happier resolution about the problems of parenthood, Valerie, seeing that Peter is more interested in his college career than his fatherhood, renounces him and decides to offer the baby for adoption (190-92).

IV. CRITICAL EVALUATION AND PEDAGOGIC RESPONSES: ATTACKING THE PARADIGM

Now that several works have been scanned for paradigmatic elements, it may be helpful to consolidate some general criticism before engaging in a pedagogic response. First, it should be noted that adolescent fiction on abortion in the 1960s seemed to be "masked" or, better yet, "encased" in a larger, more comprehensive plot which involves the adult characters of the novel. For example, Romulus Linney's 1965 novel *Slowly, by Thy Hand Unfurled* depicts the anguish of a mother who comes to realize two brutal truths: first, that her daughter had an abortion and died of it; second, that the daughter seems to have had the abortion at her mother's insistence. Similarly, the concerns of Carla, the young mother who seeks an abortion in Violet Weingarten's 1967 novel *Mrs. Beneker*, occupy only a small portion of the plot. Even though 1967 is a decisive year in

abortion history in the United States, the more dominant concern in the novel is a feminist one: the emergence of Lila Beneker, who in her middle age is finally developing her talents as a liberated woman.

The situation is similar in another novel in this pre-*Roe* period, B. J. Chute's *The Story of a Small Life* (1971). Richard Harris, the narrator, is concerned not so much that a seventeen-year-old young man whom he admires gets his girlfriend an abortion as that the young man get out of the ghetto. Even though abortion permeates this novel, the function of the narrator is clear: he is distant from the actors in the abortion subplot; the novel is his spiritual quest, at which, of course, he dismally fails.^{xiii}

A period of less than a decade spans the earliest of the novels I have read before abortion was legalized in the United States throughout the nine months of pregnancy. Adolescent novels in the years immediately preceding and following *Roe* were strong in their support for abortion; this pro-abortion bias continued until the decade's end. Although an uncomfortable decision for teen mothers, abortion is never questioned as an inappropriate course of action in Gunnel Beckman's 1973 novel *Mia Alone*. Jeannette Eyerly's 1972 novel *Bonnie Jo, Go Home* is an extremely hostile account of a mother who wants to abort. Abortion is the social-worker's cure for the poverty and for the apparent hopelessness of the African-American lead character in Rosa Guy's 1978 novel *Edith Jackson*.

And yet, despite the stridency of some of the characters in firmly pro-abortion novels, the 1970s can boast of a life-affirming trend as well. Evelyn Minshull's 1976 novel *But I Thought You Really Loved Me* is one of many novels which explore the situation of a young mother who has decided to give birth to her baby. Korie, who is not a sexually-promiscuous young woman, happened to fall for the very attractive Ron who impregnated her. When Ron not only rejects the baby but also rejects her, Korie turns to the people who love her the most: her family.

The theme of mothers who return to the safety of their families after the difficult experience of being rejected in love (and maybe even abandoned by their lovers as in Korie's case) continues throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. These novels show a growing trend toward the principle that abortion is a negative solution to an untimely pregnancy.

According to Jane S. Bakerman and Mary Jean DeMarr, who studied adolescent fiction in the two decades from 1961 to 1981, some fiction began this life-affirming trend in the late 1970s. Joyce Carol Oates's 1978 novel *Son of the Morning* depicts a teen mother who wants to keep her baby after her lover abandons her. They also categorize Joyce Maynard's 1981 novel *Baby Love* as a novel about teen mothers who want to keep their babies.

A new trend developed in the 1990s, however, that proved not only commercially acceptable but appealing to the mass of the teen reading audience: consideration of the role and reaction of the unwed father to an untimely pregnancy. This decade saw a variety of fictional accounts of young teen fathers who may at first have been strongly unwilling to have anything to do with their unborn children but who ultimately become their born children's best defenders. Such is the case in Marilyn Reynolds's 1994 novel *Too Soon for Jeff*.

This trend toward the father's view of life-affirming options may indicate that abortion itself as subject matter may be submerging itself under a more prominent one, just as it was a subordinate issue for fiction in the 1960s. The interest in abortion as a prime factor in the plot is waning even more significantly within the general view against fiction with life-affirming themes. Norma Klein's 1988 novel *No More Saturday Nights* may be one of the earliest novels to connect the dramatic tension of an unwed teen father and the trend to look beyond abortion as a dilemma which seems unsurmountable. The bibliographic summary for this novel reads: "A seventeen-year-old unmarried father wins the rights to custody of his son in court; goes off to college in New York City, where he finds an apartment with three girls as roommates; and improves his relationship with his own father, always knowing his baby is the most important thing in his life." Terry Farish's 1990 novel *Shelter for a Seabird* is summarized in its bibliographic record as: "At a time when her stern father seems determined to sell the island home where her family has lived for generations, sixteen-year-old Andrea is swept into a doomed romance with a nineteen-year-old AWOL soldier." Kimberly M. Ballard's 1991 novel *Light at Summer's End* is concerned not with an abortion decision to be made by the fourteen-year-old lead character but

by the decision to abort which her mother made. Ballard's novel shows how excruciating the abortion decision is for other persons involved: siblings, the father of the child, and grandparents.^{xiv} Berlie Doherty's 1992 novel *Dear Nobody* is summarized as a story where "Eighteen-year-old Chris struggles to deal with two shocks that have changed his life, his meeting the mother who left him and his father when he was ten and his discovery that he has gotten his girlfriend pregnant." Another 1992 novel, Geraldine Kaye's *Someone Else's Baby*, makes it clear that abortion for the young mother involved is not a serious option; deciding whether to keep the baby or not is the real concern: "Seventeen-year-old Terry, single and pregnant, decides to keep a journal to help herself come to terms with an unhappy homelife and poor self-image as she tries to decide whether or not to keep her baby." This is also the case in Marilyn Reynolds's 1993 novel *Detour for Emmy*, which is summarized as an exploration of a young mother of a child already born: "Emmy, whose future had once looked so bright, struggles to overcome the isolation and depression brought about by being a teen mother who gets little support from her family or the father of her child."^{xv} C. B. Christiansen's 1994 collection of short stories, *I See the Moon*, is summarized in its bibliographic record thus: "Twelve-year-old Bitte learns the answer to the question, 'What is love?' when her older sister decides to place her unborn child for adoption." Abortion as an issue is certainly of secondary importance in Doran Larsen's 1997 novel *Marginalia*, which is primarily concerned with abused children and adolescents in the Buffalo area. The latest contribution to the body of adolescent abortion fiction is James Wilcox's 1998 novel *Plain and Normal*, which seems to merge the popular fascination with homosexual and lesbian issues with the plight of teens dealing with untimely pregnancy. It is obvious, however, that the issues which were once most characteristic of teen fiction (untimely pregnancy or serious thoughts about abortion) are relegated in this novel to the exploits of homosexual men in Manhattan and in an imaginary place in Louisiana.

THE LEGITIMACY OF THE PARADIGM

After having gone through several key works of teen abortion

fiction, it may be helpful to demonstrate how one can attack the legitimacy of the paradigm as used as a template for such fiction. Just because an author may adapt his or her story to such a tight outline does not mean that the outline itself is beyond question. In fact, it is our duty to attack it in order to demonstrate that abortion novels need not follow such a pro-abortion bias. If we are in the business of encouraging our students to think positively about life, to surmount whatever problems are thrown their way, and to encourage them to become fully human, then we must guide them in the dissolution of some of the nastier elements of the outline. It is our task to demonstrate to our students that sometimes the fiction which they have read can be severely questioned—as strongly as anti-lifers would question the value of human life. Therefore, I would like to offer some “speed bumps” to help our students understand that they need not necessarily adopt the elements of this paradigm as a contemporary decalogue to guide their reading or their lives.

One counter to the validity of the outline is to ask students why an irreligious attitude seems necessary for modern life. Why are so many characters not so much seemingly tolerant of others’ religion but openly anti-religion? More acutely, why are Roman Catholics so reviled in contemporary teen fiction on abortion?^{xvi} In Grau’s *The House on Coliseum Street*, Joan is a lapsed Catholic (8). When she arrives at the abortion clinic, strongly anti-life Bonnie in Eyerly’s *Bonnie Jo, Go Home* is suspicious that the cab driver is Catholic (26). Bonnie has a supposedly Catholic friend who helps to arrange the abortion for her (59). Leda, the heroine in Klein’s *Beginners’ Love*, and her friend dress up as nuns in one episode, only to mock them (114-15). Christy, the mother in Reynolds’s *Too Soon for Jeff* who is later shown to be manipulative, had a Catholic grade school background (40). This is the same young woman who yells at her father that “All you care about is what your stupid old church says!” (64).

A review of sexuality can assault the integrity of the outline as well. What is sex? It might be helpful to encourage students to discuss whether they truly believe in the merely secular rendition of the definition. If a secular view of the term is accepted among today’s students, then it can be pointed out that the characters in these novels

demonstrate how sex, which was perceived as something purely stimulus-driven and seemingly beautiful between a young man and a young woman, can become selfish and demeaning.

Moreover, why should a young person immediately think of Planned Parenthood when discussing birth control and abortion? Planned Parenthood immediately comes to Peter's mind when he suggests the abortion of his child in Cole's *What Kind of Love? The Diary of a Pregnant Teenager* (44); the mother of his child, Valerie, assumes Planned Parenthood is the place to go for birth control (48).^{xvii} The lead character in Eyerly's *Bonnie Jo, Go Home* sees a child in a baby stroller pasted with a "Planned Parenthood" sticker (6). On hearing that his girlfriend is pregnant, Donnie (in Luger's *Lauren*) commands her to go to Planned Parenthood (19). The Women's Center staffperson in Stephensen's *Unbirthday* who relates her own abortion experience to the protagonist of the novel automatically thinks that she "could get help from Planned Parenthood" (72). Jeff's inability to control his sexual promiscuity in Reynolds's *Too Soon for Jeff* can perhaps be attributed to the fact that he was enrolled at a human sexuality class at Planned Parenthood (57).

Where are the abstinence courses and programs? Where is Birthright? Where are any of the crisis pregnancy support groups around the country that have served the maternal, legal, and financial needs of mothers with untimely pregnancies since before the *Roe* decision? Why don't these pregnancy-support groups appear in teen abortion fiction? And, in true Marxist literary critical fashion, if they do not appear, then students should examine why they do not. Their absence may be evidence of the oppressive power of an anti-life feminist distortion of matriarchy.

The outline can also be attacked from a feminist viewpoint in another manner. If today's young woman is truly the feminist society supposedly makes her to be, then she should assert her right over the father's non-compliance with her choice to give birth.

Some feminist writers argue that such teen fiction liberates teens—female teens, especially, of course, since female teenagers are women in an expansively denotative and connotative definition of "woman."

Proposing an alternative feminist view is not only politically-incorrect in today's academic world but also revolutionary since the standard party-line feminist thinking is that sexuality liberates pure and simple; there is no discussion of the responsibilities which go along with sexual rights. These feminist writers are absolutely positive that teen sexuality has solely empowering tendencies whose primary function is to overcome the much-aligned and difficult-to-define term "patriarchy."^{xviii} What does this really mean, however? Does it mean that party-line feminist thinking is so deeply entrenched in a view of sexuality that it obscures the fact that sometimes young women who engage in sexual activity face certain "dire consequences" of a failed sexual interest when the boyfriend leaves her when she's pregnant? Does it mean that the party-line feminist thinking is blind to the presence of a third party—the unborn child—who is often sacrificed as the teen sexual partners debate how they should live the rest of their lives? Could it also mean that party-line feminist thinking is bankrupt—as is the fiction which embodies such thinking—and that readers must therefore turn to creative authors like Ballard, Cole, Luger, Minshull, and Rodowsky to provide that alternative feminist envisioning?

More importantly, for purposes of examining the fourth aspect of the analysis in the classroom, students should be asked about the relative merits of each of the two outcomes. The first outcome is clearly the result of a bad choice. Abortion—despite any of its linguistic masks as "freedom of choice" or "pregnancy termination" or the exercise of a tenuous "right to choose"—is still absolutely negative. It is significant that none of the teen novels which end with the mother aborting the child end "happily"—not in the saccharine kind of happiness typical of a gushy romance novel, but in the aesthetically pleasing sense of fiction which involves romance between two teen partners and which ends with love between the partners rather than ambiguity. The novels which are resolved by abortion end in a loss of romance, a loss of individual strength for the mother, and a loss of certainty. Of course, no student would object to the pleasing ending of a life born and a young woman who, in true feminist fashion—matures to adulthood when she makes the best choice for herself and her child.

I began this paper with sample opening sentences from particular

genres. Maybe the dominant feature of adolescent fiction on abortion is best characterized by the ending statements. If an adolescent abortion novel ends in the killing of the unborn child, then the ending will be as sad as that in Eyerly's *Bonnie Jo, Go Home*: "Leaving New York eleven days after she had arrived, her face seemed to have aged a year for every day she had been there" (114); or it will be as ambiguous as the ending in Klein's *Beginners' Love*: "I saw it already" (216). If, however, the adolescent abortion novel ends with a life-affirming statement, then that which ends Rodowsky's *Lucy Peale* may have already set the standard for what a young mother with low self-esteem can do in her life and that of her unborn child:

I'm ready now, and I'll go and get Doris and she'll come home with me and we'll put my stuff in the bedroom, where the crib's already set up, and her stuff in the living room, and then maybe we'll go out and I'll show her the library and the laundromat and what the beach's like in wintertime.

I'll go now and this time I'll drive right up to the house, only Pa won't be there, 'cause Doris said he had to see a man over Salisbury way. But Ma'll be there and maybe she'll come out. Or maybe I'll get brave and go inside and see Warren and Liddy and where I used to live, and even that moldy old parrot.

And maybe I'll get to see the quilt. The one Ma's making for the baby.

And as far as the rest—everything else—it's going to be okay. One way or another, it's going to be okay. (166-67)

WORKS CITED

- Bakerman, Jane S., and Mary Jean DeMarr. *Adolescent Female Portraits in the American Novel, 1961-1981*. New York: Garland, 1983
- Ballard, Kimberly M. *Light at Summer's End*. Wheaton.: Harold Shaw, 1991
- Beckman, Gunnel. *Mia Alone*. Trans. Joan Tate. New York, Viking, 1974.
Trans. of *Tre veckor over tiden*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Forlag, 1973
- Christiansen, C. B. *I See the Moon*. New York: Atheneum, 1994. Electronic.
Cuyahoga County Public Lib., OH. 3 May 1999
- Chute, B. J. *The Story of a Small Life*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1971
- Cole, Sheila. *What Kind of Love? The Diary of a Pregnant Teenager*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1995
- Doherty, Berlie. *Dear Nobody*. New York: Orchard Books, 1992. Electronic.
Cuyahoga County Public Lib., OH. 3 May 1999

- Doty, Carolyn. *A Day Late*. New York: Viking, 1980
- Eyerly, Jeannette. *Bonnie Jo, Go Home*. New York: Bantam, 1972
- Farish, Terry. *Shelter for a Seabird*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1990
Electronic. Cuyahoga County Public Lib., OH. 3 May 1999
- Faulkner, William. *The Wild Palms*. New York: Random House, 1939
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *Tender Is the Night*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934
- Grau, Shirley Ann. *The House on Coliseum Street*. New York: Knopf, 1961
- Guy, Rosa. *Edith Jackson*. New York: Viking, 1978
- Hemingway, Ernest. "Hills Like White Elephants" in *Literature and the Writing Process*. 5th ed. Eds. Elizabeth McMahan, Susan X. Day, and Robert Funk. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1999, pp. 321-24
- Herald, Diana Tixier. *Teen Genreflecting*. Englewood: Libraries Unlimited, 1997
- Hirsch, E. D. *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987
- Kaye, Geraldine. *Someone Else's Baby*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 1992. Electronic. Cuyahoga Cty. Public Lib., OH. 3 May 1999
- Klein, Norma. *Beginners' Love*. New York: Hillside Books/E.P. Dutton, 1983
_____. *No More Saturday Nights*. New York: Knopf, 1988. Electronic. Cuyahoga County Public Lib., OH. 3 May 1999
- Larsen, Doran. *Marginalia*. Sag Harbor: Permanent Press, 1997. Electronic. Cuyahoga County Public Lib., OH. 3 May 1999
- Lee, Joanne. *I Want to Keep My Baby*. New York: NAL, 1977
- Linney, Romulus. *Slowly, by Thy Hand Unfurled*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965
- Luger, Harriett. *Lauren*. New York: Viking, 1979
- Madison, Winifred. *Growing Up in a Hurry*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1973
- Maynard, Joyce. *Baby Love*. New York: Knopf, 1981
- Minshull, Evelyn. *But I Thought You Really Loved Me*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976
- Murfin, Ross, and Supryia M. Ray, eds. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. Boston: Bedford Books, 1997
- Oates, Joyce Carol. *Son of the Morning*. New York: Vanguard, 1978
- Ramsdell, Kristin. *Happily Ever After: a Guide to Reading Interests in Romance Fiction*. Littleton: 1987
- Renner, Stanley. "Moving to the Girl's Side of 'Hills Like White Elephants'" in *The Hemingway Review* 15:1 (1995):27-41
- Reynolds, Marilyn. *Beyond Dreams: True-to-Life Series from Hamilton High*.

- Buena Park: Morning Glory, 1995
- _____. *Detour for Emmy*. Buena Park: Morning Glory, 1993. Electronic. Cuyahoga County Public Lib., OH. 3 May 1999
- _____. *Too Soon for Jeff*. Buena Park: Morning Glory, 1994
- Rodowsky, Colby. *Lucy Peale*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992
- Rossner, Judith. *Emmeline*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980
- Spencer, Pam. *What Do Young Adults Read Next? A Reader's Guide to Fiction for Young Adults*. Vol. 2. Detroit: Gale, 1997
- Stephensen, A. M. *Unbirthday*. New York: Avon Books, 1982
- Sutherland, Zena. *Children & Books*. 9th ed. New York: Longman, 1997
- Too Soon for Jeff*. By Marilyn Reynolds. Perf. Freddie Prinze, Jr., and Jessica Alba. 1994. Videocassette. Films for the Humanities, 1996
- Tolman, Deborah L. "Doing Desire: Adolescent Girls' Struggles for/with Sexuality." *Through the Prism of Difference: Readings on Sex and Gender*. Eds. Maxine Baca Zinn, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Michael A. Messner. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997, pp. 173-85
- Weingarten, Violet. *Mrs. Beneker*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967
- Wilcox, James. *Plain and Normal*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1998. Electronic. Cuyahoga County Public Lib., OH. 3 May 1999

NOTES

i. With language as similarly connotative as mine, the more scholarly literary critics Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray corroborate my extemporaneous definition when they define the Gothic novel as: "a romance typically written as a long prose horror narrative that exhibits the Gothic qualities of doom and gloom as well as an emphasis on chivalry and magic. Dark, mysterious medieval castles chock full of secret passageways and (apparently) supernatural phenomena are common elements used to thrill the reader. Gothic heroes and heroines tend to be equally mysterious, with dark histories and secrets of their own. The Gothic hero is typically a man known more for his power and his charisma than for his personal goodness; the Gothic heroine's challenge is to win his love without being destroyed in the process" (149).

ii. That is, with all due respect to the (young?) man Fabio before his aviary mishap.

iii. Again, Ross and Ray record the contemporary understanding of the romance

novel not only as “a fictional account of passionate love prevailing against social, economic, or psychological odds, but any plot that revolves around love” (346).

iv. However, this conclusion was not the final one reached by the disproportionately large number of students who found this story so interesting that they culminated their final research project on an analysis of this short story. Apparently, this story is resilient enough to withstand a feminist literary critical attack as much as it is malleable to a biographical or a masculinist interpretation. What is most surprising is that many students were able to discover in the course of their research Stanley Renner’s fine critical article, which argues that, since the characters do not explicitly suggest that the abortion is definitely going to occur, an easy anti-life extrapolation of the plot of the story may be faulty—a position which refutes most students’ initial reading of the story.

I would also like to point out that I presume that at least one student was painfully aware of the message of the story. It was difficult for me during one class to press on with an explication of the story when one young woman became visibly upset while discussing it—to the point of needing to leave the room for the balance of the class time, a full forty minutes. Granted, this is a subjective comment on my part and the student herself did not confide anything to me. Unfortunately, however, we who are faculty can often gauge whether a student who becomes distressed over this one story and not others which might be more graphic, more sexual, or more politically-charged may have had an abortion and is now suffering the emotional symptoms of post-abortion syndrome.

v. See especially his commentary on SAT scores (4-5) and the lack of “shared information” in American education (19-25).

vi. Sometimes, even the library community may not be helpful in collating titles on the subject of abortion. Abortion as a subject entry does not appear in Spencer’s massive 692-page bibliographic compendium *What Do Young Adults Read Next? A Reader’s Guide to Fiction for Young Adults* (Detroit: Gale, 1997). Many authors who are considered in this paper, however, are featured as are other titles which they have written.

vii. Of course, I am aware that only a fraction of the total number of teens who are eligible to vote do so and that this lack of civic pride in electing quality candidates will remain at a plurality level when the teens become young adults in their twenties. After all, this is the decade when the United States elected someone as president on a plurality vote not once but twice in the span of four

years.

viii. In the course of my reading I discovered two intertextual references to schemes or paradigms of teen abortion fiction. Both passages ridicule the simplistic plot development of such fiction. The first passage, from A. M. Stephensen's *Unbirthday* (1982), has the main character recount her analysis of the teen abortion fiction she has read when she herself must decide whether or not to have an abortion:

"I thought back on stories I'd read. The ones I could remember were always about a girl who lost her head in the heat of passion and went all the way with some guy in the backseat of a car. Usually at a drive-in. Usually with a guy she really didn't give a damn about. Always without a contraceptive. And—surprise!—she got pregnant.

"Then she had the baby. If she married the guy, she'd end up staying home, cooking supper, washing bottles, changing diapers, and waiting for her husband to return from a long day pumping gas, after which he'd take out his frustrations on her and the kid. Or if she didn't get married, she'd leave school and put the tyke up for adoption, and since she was known to one and all as a 'bad girl,' she'd move to another part of town and after much effort find a dead-end job answering phones or selling shoes. Once in a while, she'd keep the baby. Then she'd move in with her alcoholic mother and, after trying valiantly to support her child, end up on welfare. And whiskey.

"There was only one book I could remember where a girl got an abortion. It was so badly botched she ended up puking blood all over the upholstery of her boyfriend's car on the way home, and when she got into her house and puked more blood on the rug before collapsing to the floor, her exceptionally swift parents suddenly realized what was going on and virtually disowned her." (51-52)

Another passage, in Norma Klein's *Beginners' Love* (1983), similarly reduces the simplistic plots of most teen abortion novels to set patterns. The lead female character in Klein's novel comments about teen abortion novels with her boyfriend, suggesting that a standard set of steps in plot development has made the classification trite:

"God, don't you hate those books for teen-agers where they *have* to get married and she drops out of school and they live over a garage and he works in some used car lot. And there's always some scene where some girl who had an abortion comes to visit and she's gone insane and becomes a Bowery bum, just in case you didn't get the point."

"I never read a book like that," I said.

"You're lucky.... Every other book I've read since I was *ten* is like that. The girl's a moron, the guy's a moron, they never heard of birth control. What I love are the scenes where the father takes the guy aside and says, 'Son, if you marry Betsy, you'll have to give up your football scholarship to Oklahoma State.' They're *always* going to some godforsaken place like Oklahoma State! And the guy says, 'But, Dad, I love her!'... And then there's a scene where the mother says, 'Dear, you haven't let him take

advantage of you? You know what boys are like.' Quote unquote.... God, I think writers must be really dumb! Or else they're living in the Stone Age." (163-64)

ix. The argument that a pregnancy is better described as "untimely" instead of being a "problem" is more accurate in its specificity, at least in the literary sense. The novels I have considered show that the pregnancies which result from faulty or non-existent contraception or from a hedonistic view towards sexuality are not problems to the young people involved. The characters do not so much doubt the existence of the human entity over whose life they think they have jurisdiction, but rather are much more concerned with how to continue their lifestyles—their educational choices, their career choices, and their romantic or sexual choices. The term "difficult" when used to refer to pregnancy, seems more proper when used in medical contexts.

x. The study of transgendered characterizations may be helpful here, especially in the emerging branches of gender criticism called masculinist and queer theory.

xi. Interested persons may be interested in her *Beyond Dreams: True-to-Life Series from Hamilton High* (1995). Moreover, they may find the performances of Freddie Prinze, Jr. and Jessica Alba in the video adaptation of the novel under analysis convincing.

xii. Bakerman and DeMarr have identified other titles which fall into this category of fiction written from the perspective of the mother who wants to give birth to her baby. Readers may be interested in the following: *I Want to Keep My Baby* (1977) by Joanna Lee (92-93); *Son of the Morning* (1978) by Joyce Carol Oates (125); *Emmeline* (1980) by Judith Rossner (155); and *Baby Love* (1981) by Joyce Maynard (107).

xiii. The situation of an abortion subplot in a larger adult-theme work does not dissolve after *Roe*, of course. Carolyn Doty's 1980 novel *A Day Late* uses the stereotype of a seventeen-year-old pregnant runaway to reflect (and deflect) the middle-aged crisis of Sam the protagonist. A traveling salesman, Sam finds the youth of Katy, the mother, disturbing to the point that he becomes violent against her and the young man who had befriended her. He also becomes violent against himself by spending a night with a whore. The climax in the novel is not abortion-related at all: Sam "finds himself" by engaging in a male-bonding dance with his Greek friend. The denouement, however, does return to the abortion subplot: Katy miscarries a malformed unborn child and this is considered "a blessing" (230).

xiv. Ballard is one of the bold breed of writers who are clearly identified with the pro-life movement. More importantly from a literary standpoint, her novel is not preachy or didactic, which some critics of evangelical and pro-life fiction have claimed are dominant characteristics of such life-affirming material. While there certainly are titles which are preachy (if not hostile to religious diversity), Ballard's book contains a few pages (by my estimation three) where one of the main characters, an elderly woman named Vellie, summarizes Christian principles for the other main character, fourteen-year-old Melissa (138-40). It would be interesting to see how anti-life critics or critics hostile to evangelical or pro-life fiction would evaluate the final chapter of the book. Melissa suggests holding a "service" for the aborted child which seems more pagan in liturgical setting than Christian: the service is to be conducted at dawn in the woods; while she expresses her anger and sorrow, Melissa moves stones in certain formations (143-47). Is this Wicca practice or Christian didacticism? Perhaps this is the author's intent: to frustrate those critics who would categorize her novel as merely "one of those" pro-life books.

xv. In fact, one could even argue that the title signals to the reader (the teen in the public library or the school library or in the bookstore) that the option of abortion is never entertained seriously: if unwed motherhood were so disastrous for the teen heroine, then it would be metaphorically described as a "halt" in her life, not a "detour." This connotatively implies that, while one option has been closed, another option is available.

xvi. At least one religious reference is non-denominational. Mia in Beckman's *Mia Alone* contrasts "the Christian's talk" about sanctity of human life in contrast to her family's ethics (106).

xvii. Whatever her personal position regarding this abortion organization, the author is fair when she thanks "the staff of Planned Parenthood of San Diego and Riverside Counties," among others, "for their help in understanding what it is like to be young and pregnant" (Cole; opposite title page).

xviii. Consider the following analysis of interviews of teen girls regarding sex and related issues: "To be able to know their sexual feelings, to listen when their bodies speak about themselves and about their relationships, might enable these and other girls to identify and know more clearly the sources of oppression that press on their full personhood and their capacity for knowledge, joy, and connection.... Asking these girls to speak about sexual desire, and listening and responding to their answers and also to their questions, proved to be an effective way to interrupt the standard 'dire consequences' discourse which adults usually

employ when speaking at all to girls about their sexuality. Knowing and speaking about the ways in which their sexuality continues to be unfairly constrained may interrupt the appearance of social equity that many adolescent girls (especially white, middle-class young women) naively and trustingly believe, thus leading them to reject feminism as unnecessary and mean-spirited and not relevant to their lives. As we know from the consciousness-raising activities that characterized the initial years of second-wave feminism, listening to the words of other girls and women can make it possible for girls to know and voice their experiences, their justified confusion and fears, their curiosities. Through such relationships, we help ourselves and each other to live in our different female bodies with an awareness of danger, but also with a desire to feel the power of the erotic, to fine-tune our bodies and our psyches to what Audre Lord has called the 'yes within ourselves'." (Tolman 183-84)